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POLAND: THE LAND AND THE STATE*

By EUGENIUSZ ROMER

Professor of Geography, University of Lemberg

THE PHYSICAL BASIS OF POLAND'S HISTORY

The foundation of the historical life of nations is laid down in the relatively unchanging features of the earth. Strong and organized human wills can temporarily deflect national life from the course favored by nature, but, sooner or later, life flows back into natural channels, and its return is almost invariably marked by some upheaval in customs, character, or national life.

Let us glance at the relationship between historical life and its natural foundations in the Vistula region. Along this river led the route followed by the Phenicians in their trading voyages to the Baltic for amber, as is evidenced by cowry shells in the form of amulets which have been found in prehistoric tombs along the Baltic littoral. In the fourth century of our era, as one of a series of racial migrations, a Slavic wave appears for the second time, driving the Goths against the Roman Empire. *Pulsae a superioribus barbaris*, says Julius Capitolinus,¹ referring to the Goths. The Slavs continued to push onward, until the limit of their westward expansion was set by Charlemagne, whose name stood for power among the western Slavs.

The western frontier of Slav territory was at that time marked by the rivers Elbe and Saale (Fig. 1).² Settlements on the right bank of those rivers have preserved to this day the evidence of their Slav origin in their characteristic circular and road-side arrangement (termed *Runddörfer* and *Strassendörfer* by German historians). Traces of Slavic colonization are not lacking on the left banks either, but the scattered circular villages

* This article is based on a translation of an original manuscript in Polish by Professor Romer which was received by the Society before the entry of the United States into the war. It was originally accompanied by a series of maps by the author, which, however, were not passed by the military censor. With the guidance of the brief titles and references to the sources interspersed in the text, the present series was compiled. Professor Romer is of course not responsible for the accuracy of either the maps or the translation.

¹ P. J. Schafarik: *Slavische Altertümer*, Leipzig, 1843-44, Vol. 1, p. 507; Montelius: *Die Einwanderung der Slaven*, *Korrespondenz-Blatt für Anthropol., Ethnolog. und Urgeschichte*, Vol. 30, p. 127.

² Figs. 1-3 and 5-12 are based on the following sources (on which plates, is indicated in each instance):

Karl von Spruner: *Hand-Atlas für die Geschichte des Mittelalters und der neueren Zeit*. Revised by Theodor Menke. 90 maps and 376 insets. Justus Perthes, Gotha, 3rd edit., 1879.

G. Dröysen: *Allgemeiner Historischer Handatlas*. Edited by Richard Andree. 96 maps. Velhagen & Klasing, Leipzig, 1886.

R. L. Poole: *Historical Atlas of Modern Europe*. 90 maps. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1902.

F. Schrader: *Atlas de géographie historique*. 55 maps. Hachette et Cie., Paris, edition of 1911.

F. W. Putzger: *Historischer Schul-Atlas zur alten, mittleren und neuen Geschichte*. Edited by Alfred Baldamus and Ernst Schwabe. 234 maps. Velhagen & Klasing, Leipzig, 29th edition, 1905.

W. R. Shepherd: *Historical Atlas*. 216 maps. Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1911. [Based largely on the preceding.]

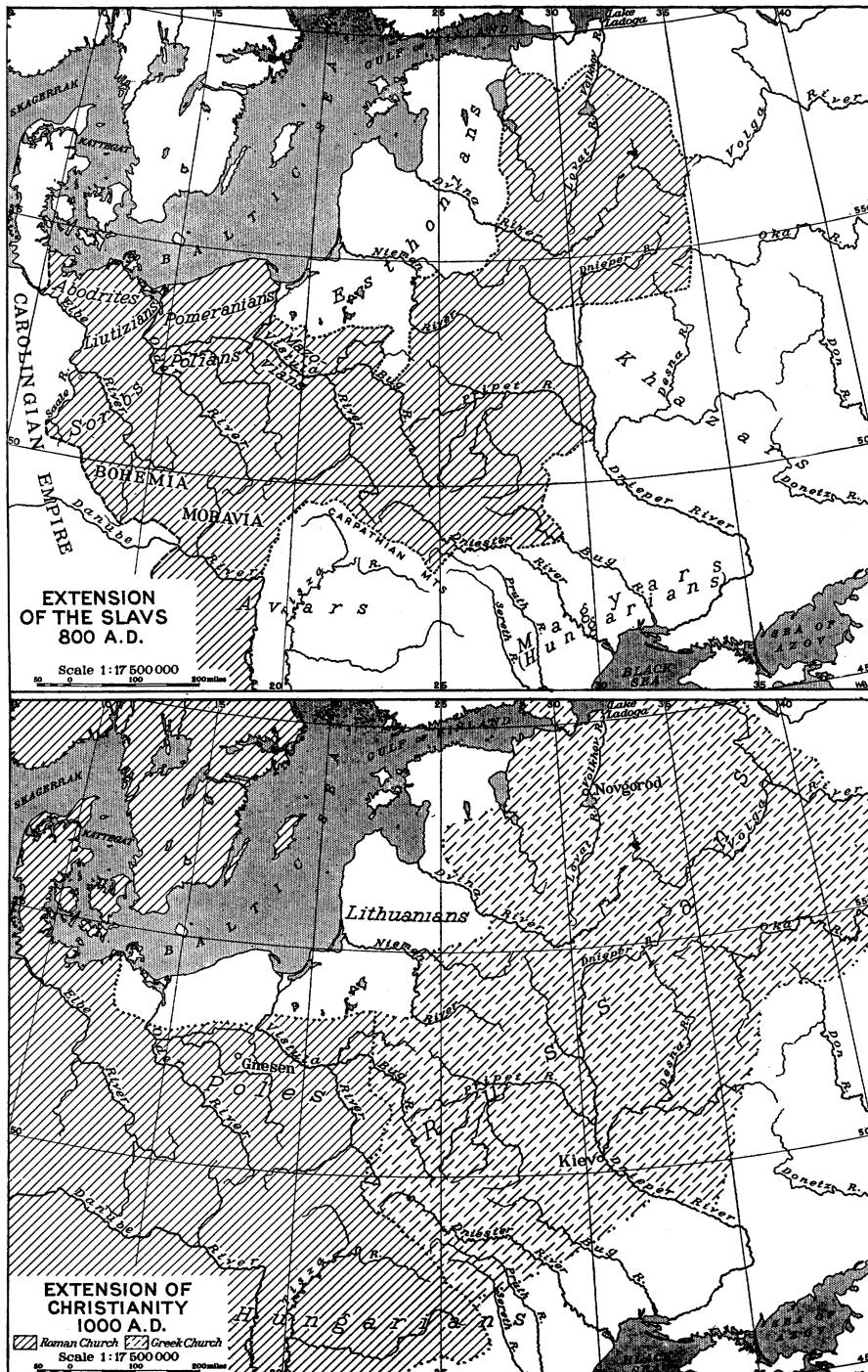


FIG. 1 (upper). Based on Spruner-Menke, Pl. 3, and Shepherd, Pl. 54-55. The area designated "Esthonians" included Lithuanians and other tribes.

FIG. 2 (lower). Based on Shepherd, Pl. 66-67, inset. On Spruner-Menke, Pl. 7, a pagan zone intervenes between the Oka River and the Gulf of Finland.

here are less frequent than the predominating village of compact form (*Haufendorf*) typical of Germanic settlements.³

The Slav world of that period extended, in the west, northward to the Baltic between the lower Vistula and the Oder, while farther east it was separated from the sea by the territory of the Estonian and Lithuanian tribes. In the south it reached the Carpathians, and along the rivers Dniester and Bug it was pushing towards the Black Sea, from which it was barred, however, by the powerful state of the Khazars and their kindred peoples the Bulgars and Magyars. At this period Slav settlements in the northeast extended along the northern affluents of the Dnieper almost to the Gulf of Finland. But they did not quite reach the sea, being stopped by a seemingly small obstacle.

Steep, almost precipitous, escarpments rise in places to a height of one or two hundred feet, over which the affluents of the Gulf of Finland and of Lake Ladoga fall in roaring cataracts. In the face of such obstacles to communication, Slav expansion always halted. For the same reason it avoided the meridional part of the course of the Niemen, between the present sites of Grodno and Kovno, where that river, leaving its upper, relatively shallow valley, flows through a deeply cut and picturesquely winding ravine. Nowhere did the Slavs of those days penetrate into the region of the eastern affluents of the Dnieper. They were held back, possibly, by the main river itself, which flows with great volume at the time of the spring floods. They halted also at the middle of the course of other Black Sea rivers, such as the Dniester and Bug, at the point where these rivers descend from the broad meadows of the upland and enter deep, wooded ravines.

The Slavs of that time moved along broad valleys. They stopped before narrow and winding ravines, at the thresholds of valleys, and in front of waterfalls. They were stopped by Charlemagne on the Elbe where that river, deprived of any western affluents below the mouth of the Saale, is in itself a barrier for a people that moved only along broad valleys.

What were the peoples whom Ptolemy called by the general name of *Venedae*, and Procopius by that of *Sclaveni* or *Slaveni*? Already differentiated, they formed numerous groups in the Frankish period. The eastern of these tribes, nameless at first, were destined to play a prominent part in later history. In the southwest the Bohemian-Moravian group settled down in a hilly country, so situated that it was alike protected from hostile neighbors and accessible both to Roman and Byzantine influences. No wonder, then, that this particular Slavic group made the earliest entry upon the arena of history. Through their German neighbors we happen to know the names of many of the tribes that resided in the western lowlands, such as the Abodrites (Obotrites), the Liutizians, and the Sorbs, all of them belonging

³ A. Meitzen: *Siedelung und Agrarwesen der Westgermanen und Ostgermanen, der Kelten, Römer, Finnen und Slaven; Wanderungen, Anbau und Agrarrecht der Völker Europas nördlich der Alpen*, 3 vols. and atlas, Berlin, 1895; reference in Vol. 3, Part 1, and atlas.

to the group of the Polabs, or Slavs of the Elbe. The history of all these tribes has but one tale to tell: the alternative of extermination or Germanization. To the east of the Polabs resided the Lekhs, or Poles, among whom Nestor, an early chronicler, counts the Polians, Mazovians, Pomeranians, and Liutizians.⁴ From Nestor's account one must conclude that the Liutizians and probably the entire group of the Polabs belonged, in tribe and language, to the Poles (Lekhs). This historical inference is confirmed by linguistic research.⁵ A further inference of importance is to be derived from linguistics. If we cast a glance upon Nitsch's map showing the present distribution of the various forms of Polish⁶ it will be seen that the section where the language is the most homogeneous, where it possesses the smallest number of peculiarities of dialect, and where it most closely approaches the accepted literary form, is located on the westernmost edge of Polish linguistic territory. Is not this extreme peripheral position of the main body of the Polish tongue a proof that Germanization has not been limited to the Polabs alone?

Germanization went hand in hand with Christianity, for, as the eminent historian Potkanski puts it,⁷ together with the cross the German apostles carried into Slavdom the boundary posts of the German state. This movement had its good side, however. It stimulated the Slavs to political organization and, consequently, to an apostolic propaganda of their own as a shield for national independence.

But we are not concerned here with historical processes but with the relationship existing between them and the land. Christianity radiated across Slavdom from both Roman and Byzantine sources. It penetrated through various channels. The movement reached its greatest intensity in the tenth century. Figure 2 illustrates the actual extent of Christianity in the year 1000. This map has a certain resemblance to that of the extension of the Slavs two hundred years before. In the direction of the Baltic, Christianity met the same or even greater obstacles than did Slavdom in the Frankish period. Just as Slavdom had, at that time, avoided the gorge of the Niemen between Grodno and Kovno, so Christianity came to a standstill before this obstacle. In the east Christianity extended farther in the year 1000 than Slavdom did in the time of Charlemagne. Its victorious advance was only stopped on the lower Dnieper where the rapids⁸ caused by the passage of that river through the South Russian granite threshold form an obstacle to navigation.

⁴ Schafarik, *op. cit.*, pp. 349-409.

⁵ Rozwadowski: The Relationship between the Polish and Other Slavonic Languages, *Polish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, p. 379. Acad. of Sci., Cracow, 1915. [In Polish.]

⁶ Accompanying Casimir Nitsch: Dialectology of the Polish Language, *Polish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, p. 238 ff., Acad. of Sci., Cracow, 1915. [In Polish.]

See also *idem*: *Quelques remarques sur la langue polabe*, *Archiv für slavische Philologie*, 1907, p. 169 ff.

⁷ Potkanski: Cracow under the Piasts, *Travaux de l'Acad. des Sci. de Cracovie: Classe d'Hist. et de Philos.*, Vol. 35, 1898, p. 170. [In Polish.]

⁸ *Porony*, literally "thresholds."

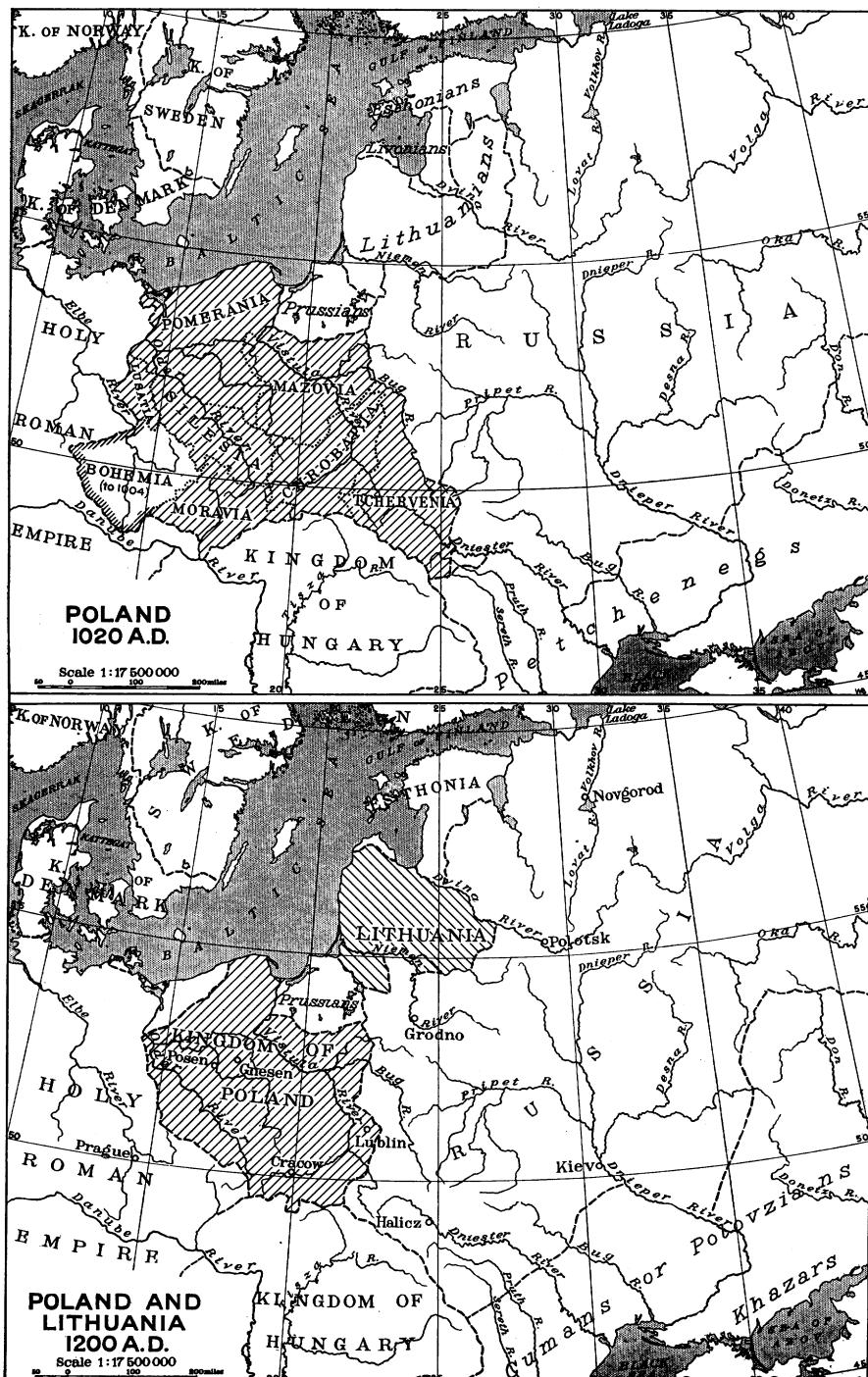


FIG. 3 (upper). Based on Spruner-Menke, Pl. 69, inset, and Putzger, Pl. 15, inset.
 FIG. 5 (lower). Based on Shepherd, Pl. 70-71. The term "Russia" on Figs. 3 and 5 is used only in a general sense to group together the various constituent states.

At the end of the tenth century the now fully developed Polish state becomes an historical factor. The political expansion of this state during the reign of Boleslav the Great (992-1025) strikes the keynote of the nation's forthcoming development as conditioned by its geographical setting (Fig. 3). If we eliminate the districts which had succumbed to early Germanization, we are immediately struck by the likeness existing between the extent of Slavdom in 800, of Christianity in 1000, and of the Polish state at the beginning of the eleventh century. When we remember that Poland occupied, under Boleslav's predecessor, in 962, an area of only 40,000 square miles, while it increased fifty years later to over 170,000 square miles, it becomes evident that the sword of Boleslav had found a powerful ally in the individuality of the land.

THE NATURAL HIGHWAYS OF POLAND'S POLITICAL EXPANSION

The territorial extent of Poland at the time of Boleslav and its subsequent history demonstrate the importance of four great natural highways:

(1) The series of great east-and-west valleys (Fig. 4) which extend across the Polish-German lowland from the Pripet to the Elbe⁹ athwart whose eastern end the Poland of Boleslav came to halt on the line of the Bug.¹⁰ This fact, at variance with the contemporary expansion of Christianity and also with that of Slavdom in 800, is explained by the simultaneous rise, out of the Slavic body, of two states, that of the Ruthenia of Kiev and that of Poland, both of them moving to some extent along the same road and pressing upon each other on the line of the Bug.

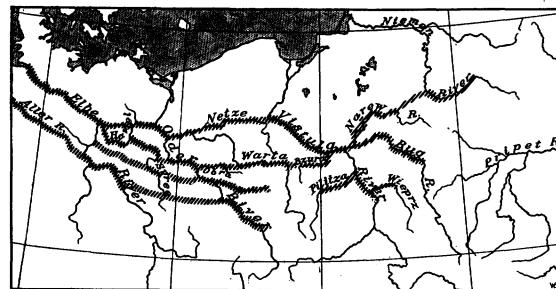


FIG. 4—The east-and-west, proglacial valleys of the Polish-German Lowland. Scale, 1:17,500,000. Based on Wahnschaffe and Keilhack (see footnote 9), extended to the east according to Hettner: *Länderkunde von Europa*.

(2) The southeastern highway, along which Poland acquired, at the dawn of her history, that part of Ruthenia called Red Russia, and which brought Boleslav, on the trail of Christianity, to the gates of Kiev.

⁹ The *Urstromtäler*, or proglacial valleys, of German geologists. See F. Wahnschaffe: *Die Oberflächen-gestaltung des norddeutschen Flachlandes*, with map, *Forschungen zur deutschen Landes- und Volkskunde*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 3rd edit., Stuttgart, 1909; and K. Keilhack: *Die Stillstandslagen des letzten Inlandeises und die hydrographische Entwicklung des pommerschen Küstengebietes*, with map, *Jahrb. Kgl. Preuss. Landesanstalt*, 1898, pp. 90-152.—EDIT. NOTE.

¹⁰ The main right tributary of the Vistula. Not to be confused with the river of the same name, previously referred to, which drains into the Black Sea. In Russian, as in English, both names are spelled alike, but in Polish the former is written *Bug* and the latter *Boh*.—EDIT. NOTE.

(3) The southwestern highway, through which Boleslav's Poland reached the hills of Bohemia and Moravia and even advanced to the Danube.

(4) The northern, Baltic highway, along which Poland first attained the sea.

Of all these highways only the east-and-west valleys were entirely free from natural obstacles. Poland's development in an easterly direction had no obstacle to fear but that of some other organized national will: a Lithuania or Ruthenia. All the other highways, although definitely marked out by the natural features of the country, partook of the nature of defiles. Whoever held the defile became master of the adjoining territory. The valiant armies of Boleslav forced the southwestern defile¹¹ and at once came into possession of the Bohemian lands, extending as far as the Danube. But during the entire century that preceded the expansion under Boleslav, this defile had been held by the Bohemians, and, consequently, all Polish territory as far north as the hills of Little Poland and as far east as the Bug was under the control of Bohemia. After Boleslav's time this district reverted to Bohemia, and, although the country to the north of the Carpathians remained Polish, the province of Silesia, separated from Poland by a wilderness of sands and woods, detached itself from her politically.

A similar statement is true of the southeastern highway, Red Russia having been in turn controlled by Cracow and Kiev. Only after the power of Kiev had been paralyzed by the Tatar shock in the thirteenth century did Red Russia, linked to Poland by the gateway of Przemysl, steadily gravitate towards the west. Nothing more clearly demonstrates the physical influences at work in Ruthenian history than the fact that Red Russia, located near the Polish gate of Przemysl, became the first district, and for many centuries remained the only district, where Romanism tried to make inroads into the Byzantine see.

The Baltic highway was less dangerous. It possessed no "hinterland" and, accordingly, at first contained no source of danger. But the passage from the broad valley floors of the Warta and Notetz (Netze) to the Baltic Heights was rendered so difficult by the lack of natural ways of communication that only in her most brilliant period could Poland exert an efficient control over that gate. And when, during a period of weakness, she allowed the Knights of the Teutonic Order to organize on the lower Vistula and they allied themselves to the rulers of the March of Brandenburg, which had been erected on the ruins of Polabian Slavdom—then in that very region arose the greatest danger to the Polish state.

THE LITHUANIAN HIGHWAY

Besides these four, another natural highway, that which linked the north with the south, has played a large part in Poland's history. Even as

¹¹ The "Moravian Gate," the depression between the Sudetic Mountains and the Carpathians.

early as the time of Charlemagne it had been a decisive factor in the expansion of the Slavs. This is the Lithuanian highway.

The Lithuanians are an Indo-European tribe of the Baltic group, mentioned for the first time by Tacitus under the name of *Aestii*.¹² This people possessed, in its native ability and its favorable location on a long coast line, elements with which to evolve a powerful state. After the Teutonic Knights had settled down and conquered the Prussians, one of the tribes of the same Baltic group, and after the organization of a similar military order on the lower Dvina had suppressed the Letts—still another tribe of that group—the Lithuanians alone saved their independence by quick political organization and by the aid of Ruthenia, a state which at the time was highly advanced in culture.¹³ But young Lithuania's geographical position in itself augured well for an immense territorial growth.

Until the end of the twelfth century Lithuania was confined to the monotonous Baltic region and did not extend inland beyond the bend of the Niemen near Kovno where the river issues from its winding ravine (Fig. 5). Having been hard pressed by the Teutonic Knights during the thirteenth century, the Lithuanians at last emerged beyond the valley of the Vilia and took possession of the highroads which dominate the great southern route along the Berezina into the territory of Ruthenia. Thus in a single century, from a small nucleus a great state developed (Fig. 6). The territory of Lithuania before the time of Mendovg (1240-63) covered 30,000 square miles. In the time of Olgierd (1345-77) it covered nearly 250,000 square miles.

The study of the preceding maps leads us to the recognition of a general law. Within the Polish state, and at the stage of its greatest development, there existed a sheaf, as it were, of natural highways, with the heart of Poland for its knot, all of which roads gradually faded away to the east beyond the Dnieper. Poland was the natural link between west and east, that function coming to an end beyond the Dnieper. Here, broadly, ended the territory which aroused in states and commonwealths the impulse known in German history as the *Drang nach Osten*. This impulse, indeed, dominates the entire history of Poland; signs of it are not lacking even in the history of France. The reason for this lies in the general arrangement of the river systems in that part of Europe.

All the rivers in this region, in the lower part of their course, receive practically all of their tributaries from the right, that is, from the east. The basin of the Loire points to a connection with that of the Seine, while the numerous right affluents of the latter direct the expansion of France toward Belgian lands, as witness the Walloons. Farther east the same condition holds true (see Fig. 4): the Weser receives, on the right, the Aller; the Elbe receives the Spree with the Havel; the Oder, the Warta with the

¹² Tacitus: *Germania*, Chapter 45.

¹³ Rozwadowski: *The Baltic Languages*, *Polish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, Acad. of Sci., Cracow, 1915. [In Polish.]

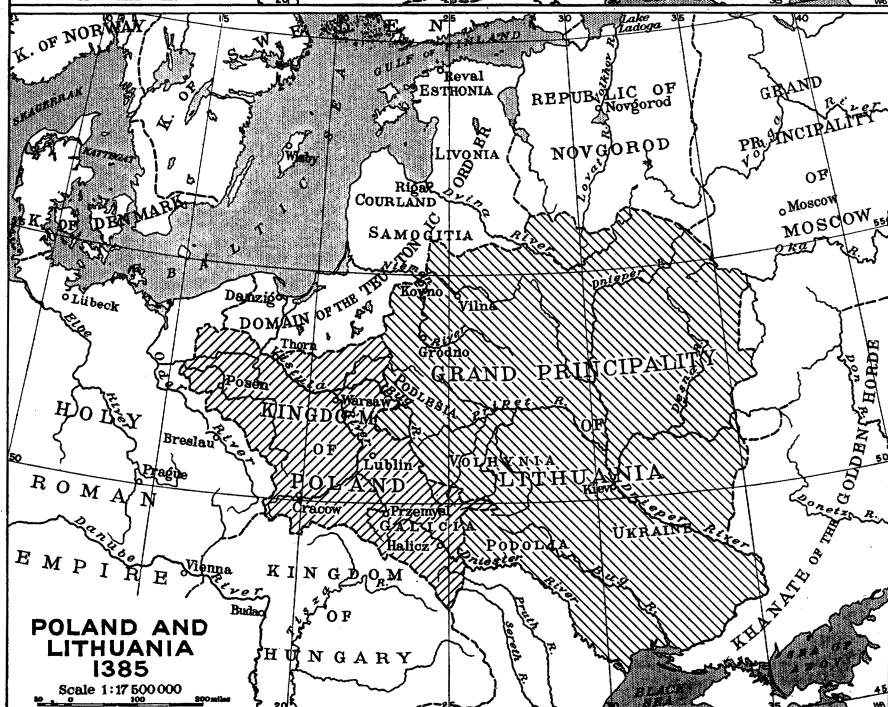
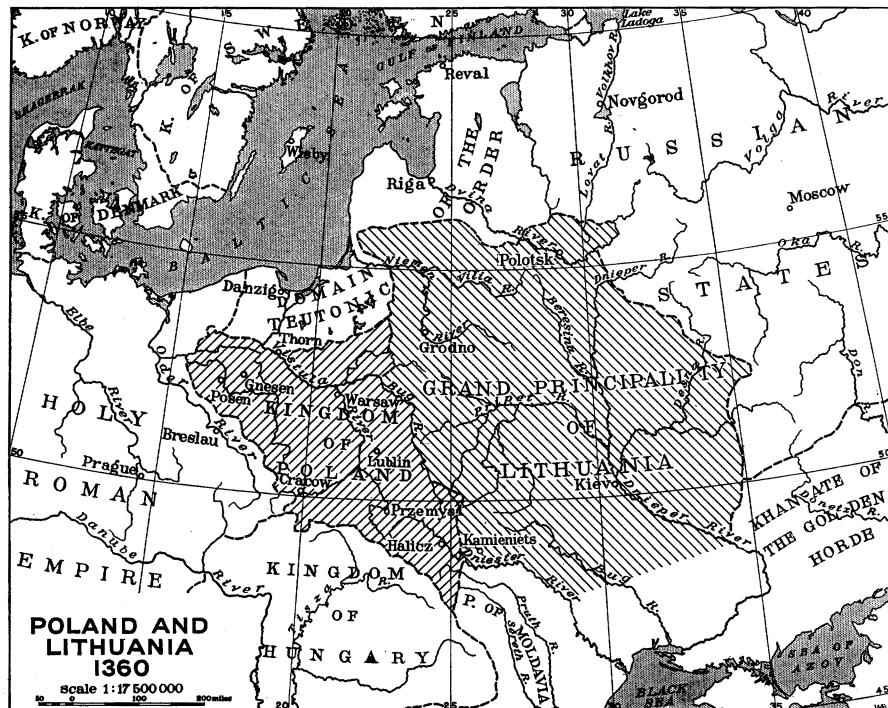


FIG. 6 (upper). Based on Shepherd, Pl. 77.

FIG. 6 (upper). Based on Shephard, Pl. 77.
 FIG. 7 (lower). Based on Spruner-Menke, Pl. 69, and Putzger, Pl. 176 and Pl. 196, lower.

Notetz (Netze); the Vistula receives the San, pointing to the Dniester, the Bug, which connects her with the basin of the Dnieper by means of the Pripet, and the Narew, which links her to the Niemen. The Niemen, finally, receives the Vilia, leading on to the Dvina. Beyond the Dvina this arrangement is less conspicuous, while beyond the Dnieper it vanishes altogether.

This brief summary shows that the topography favorable to eastward racial pressure has attained its climax of development in the basin of the Vistula. That the term *Drang nach Osten* is identified more especially with German history is due not to a greater suitability of the German region to this tendency, but, on the whole, to the way in which the German people have utilized it. This tendency has expressed itself quite differently in Poland's history. In order fully to understand the difference, it is necessary to take into account yet another feature of the Polish region and compare it with the history of Russia. Poland, limited on the south by the Carpathians, is not a plane gradually sloping from there to the sea: it is a broad depression leading from west to east, into which the rivers flow in a concentric direction and out of which they flow into both the Baltic and the Black Sea through deeply cut gorges or winding ravines, across the lake-dotted uplands of the Baltic Heights and the broad plateaus that slope down to the Black Sea. The affluents of the Vistula, more numerous from the east than is the case with any of the other river systems to the west, would indeed seem to have assigned to Poland an eastward expansion on a scale impossible in the west, where the lowland belt is narrower. How different the map of Europe might now be had not the Poles been a people whose social and political institutions were directly opposed to the spirit of conquest!

No such physical basis for expansion in one direction only exists in Russia. Here the general character of the land favors an altogether different movement. In contrast to the shallow bowl shape of the Polish region, Great Russia, the core of Russia, may be likened in shape to a flat dome from which the waters of all the great rivers—Volga, Oka, Don, Desna, upper Dnieper, and Dvina—flow outwards, imparting an impulse to the race bred in that cradle to expand in all directions. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Lithuanians, on the one hand facing a physical configuration that threatened them from both north and east and, on the other, open to unobstructed intercourse with unaggressive Poland, tendered a fraternal hand to the Poles and brought about the voluntary union of their two countries, an instance almost unique in history.

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE BOUNDARIES OF POLAND AND HER RIVERS

Having analyzed Poland's history in the light of the physical features of the land, let us examine the question of her boundaries from the same point of view. Consider, for example, the evolution of Polish frontiers as influenced by the union of Poland with Lithuania. Figure 7 shows the

boundaries at the time of the first (a personal) union. This map illustrates the necessity for that union. It was born of the western danger, the beating back of Poland from the Baltic. This danger was deadly, in spite of the country's open access to the Black Sea, which had lost in importance since the rise of Turkish power. The union became a source of strength that entirely removed the Germanic menace: the Teutonic Knights were beaten and an extended coast line was secured on the Baltic Sea. Figure 8 illustrates this state of affairs. It also shows, however, that wrestling with the western foe had weakened the defense against the eastern danger. In the east Poland established defensive border lines by retiring to two great rivers: the Dvina and the Dnieper. The eastern peril growing, the personal union of the rulers became strengthened by a real union of the two countries (1569). Figure 9 indicates the results: the Baltic coastline is extended, the eastern frontier is shifted far beyond the line of the main rivers, almost to their watersheds. This is Poland's most brilliant picture. The evil omen of decline already appears on the horizon in the form of vassal Prussia, now freed by the will of sovereign Poland.

In these three instances, to which many others might be added, the physiographic law of frontiers is exemplified. Frontiers are, as it were, snap-shots of the life of nations. Being an expression of that life, they can temporarily only, or as a symptom of decay, follow the valleys of main rivers. Main rivers are arteries of national life which cannot, without exposure to fatal blows, be situated on the periphery of a living organism. Hence the vital expansion of a nation always tends to proceed beyond the valleys toward the watersheds.¹⁴

THE BOUNDARIES OF POLAND'S PROVINCES AND HER RIVERS

Rivers not only were decisive factors in determining the direction and extent of Poland's expansion as a whole, but also in determining her subdivisions. For, in the lowland area that is Poland, the configuration of the land is in great part dependent on the drainage system. As a consequence there developed a division into the longitudinal zones characteristic of the Polish state. The first zone is the broad belt of the great east-and-west valleys, the cradle and center of Poland, including Great Poland, Cuyavia, and Mazovia (see Fig. 11). The second is the zone of moderate relief which includes the Polish Heights within the arc of the upper Vistula and the foothills of the Carpathians and Sudetic Mountains, that is, Silesia, (see Fig. 10) and Little Poland, and, in prolongation thereof, Red Russia (Fig. 11), the transition ground between Poland and the Ruthenia of

¹⁴ While this law has many historical illustrations and applies with singular force to Polish nationality, it is by no means acceptable as a living principle in the solution of the many involved problems of today. National expansion in the old sense has reached its culmination, whether or not national boundaries correspond to the limits of topographic provinces. The rights of small nations and weak peoples will never again be interpreted through the interests of powerful neighbors and through "laws" designed not to secure international rights but to further national ambitions.—EDIT. NOTE.

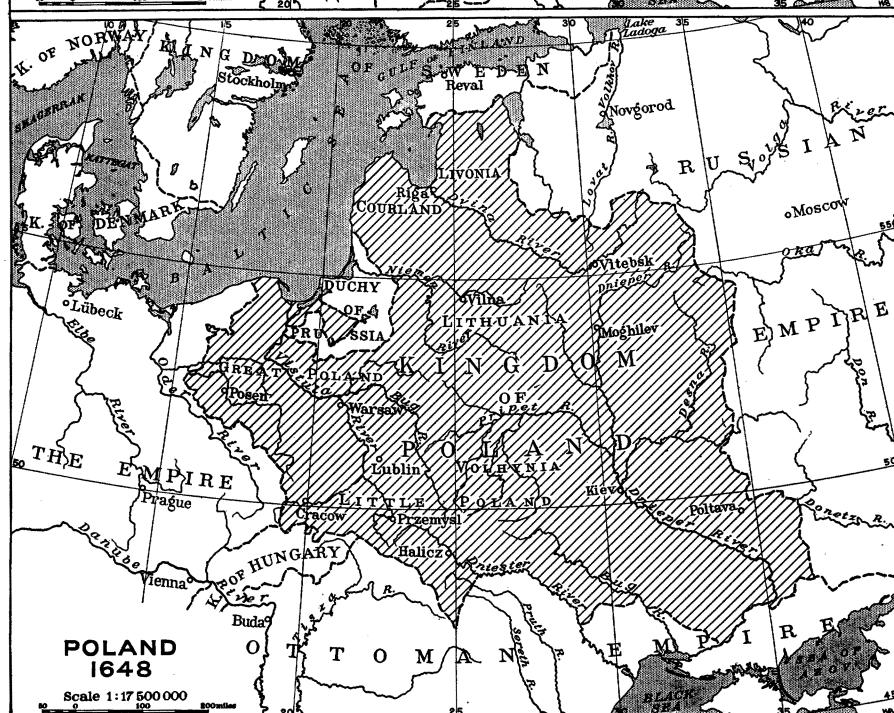
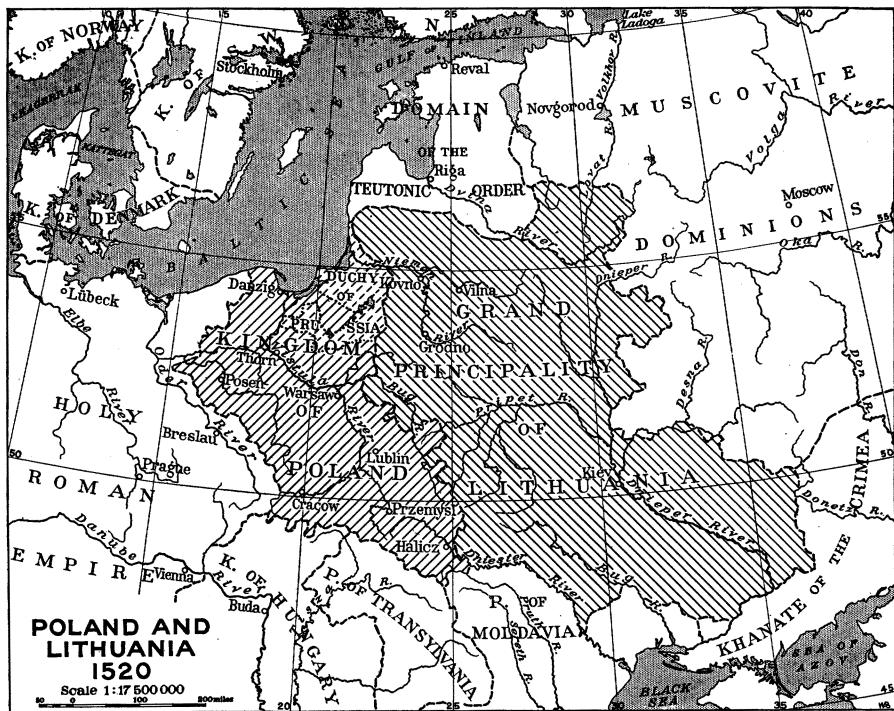


FIG. 8 (upper). Based on Droysen, Pl. 37.
 FIG. 9 (lower). Based on Droysen, Pl. 40.

Kiev, as Silesia had been the link between Poland and Bohemia. Finally, the third zone is the coastal region, including Pomerania and Prussia.

These political subdivisions, based on the physiognomy of the country, again reflect the fundamental fact that the main waterways were always the axes, never the border lines, of vital parts of the Polish organism. This is true even for Poland's first period of weakness, when she had fallen apart

into numerous separate sections and the rulers of these petty states were fighting one another. Never even in this period did a great river become a border line, not the Vistula or the Warta, nor yet the Notetz or the Pilitza.

Furthermore, just as the division and organization of the territory were based upon the character of the land, so did the nation itself draw its racial and spiritual characteristics from the soil. Pomeranian, Polian, Mazovian, Cuyavian, Silesian, etc., are not names derived, as some think,¹⁵ from political terminology; they are the

names of Polish tribes, differentiated among themselves by slight peculiarities, but all of them stamped by the individuality of the land. A novel and conclusive argument in this respect has been furnished by the researches of Nitsch, who has demonstrated that the dialectical peculiarities of the Polish language correspond exactly to the division into provinces at the time of the Piast dynasty, and also to the primitive divisions into eparchies.¹⁶

The dependence of even the smallest units of Poland's political structure on the physiognomy of the land, as exemplified by Figures 10 and 11, is so close that the calamity of the partition appears all the more painful to Polish minds. It not only struck a deadly blow at the state, but, by tearing up the frontiers of districts and autonomous provinces, shook to its innermost foundations the social and economic life of the nation. The boundaries which the various partitions of Poland (Fig. 12) have introduced into the political map of Europe have been destructive and not constructive. Rivers which once pulsated with life have now become merely dead border lines.

The actors in the crime perpetrated upon the Polish nation separated themselves from one another by boundary lines that followed rivers. Assuredly strife would not be long in breaking out again. One can hardly refrain from quoting the words of the poet, who foresaw the part to be played by the river frontier:

¹⁵ K. Kretschmer: *Historische Geographie von Mitteleuropa*, Munich, 1904, p. 173.

¹⁶ Nitsch, *op. cit.*, p. 319 ff.

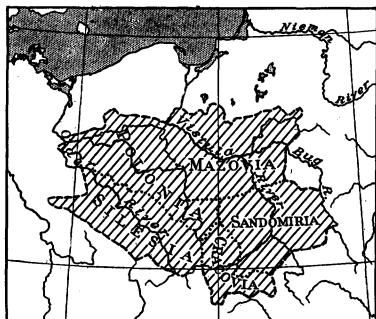


FIG. 10—The subdivisions of Poland in 1240. Scale, 1:17,500,000. Based on Spruner-Menke, Pl. 69, inset.

The Niemen separates the Lithuanians from their foes:
On this side throngs of Lithuanian youths
On the other, in helmet and armor,
The Germans on horseback stand immovable.
Each party watches the crossing.
So the Niemen, once famed for hospitality,
That linked the realms of fraternal nations,
Now for them has become the threshold of eternity:
For none without loss of life or liberty
Could cross the forbidden waters.

(Adam Mickiewicz, *Konrad Wallenrod*)

THE EASTERN MARGIN OF POLAND

An additional example of the interdependence of geography and history is afforded by the river systems of Russia and Poland.

The importance of artificial waterways and connections has been adequately appreciated only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the Russian and Polish lowlands such waterways were of particular moment. The fact that roads could not readily be built, because of the lack of stone, added to the importance of the rivers, and much was done to improve them even in the period of Poland's decline. Still greater improvement has been made upon them by Russia in the nineteenth century. Russia was obliged to try to unite in the most efficient manner an expanse whose very dimensions gave rise to centrifugal tendencies. So much has been done that it is safe to say that all the channels in any way suited to artificial reconstruction have been utilized. Russian waterways can be improved but they cannot be multiplied, at least as far as the main channels are concerned. The Volga is now linked with Lakes Ladoga and Onega and with the Northern Dvina; Lake Onega with the Northern Dvina, the Northern Dvina with the Kama; the Msta, belonging to the same system as the Volkhov (see the maps), with the Volga, the Volga with the Don. The result is that the Baltic and the Arctic Sea are connected with the Black and the Caspian Sea by a system of waterways. Of Polish waterways, the Dnieper is linked to the Dvina, as well as to the Niemen and Vistula. In the same way the Niemen is connected with the Windawa (which flows through Courland into the Baltic); and the Vistula with the Niemen, the Dnieper, and, almost, the Dniester (a project of the famous Beauplan reaching back to the seventeenth century). Thus a second chain of waterways unites the Baltic with the Black Sea. Each of these systems, the Russian and the Polish, are mutually connected, but it will be noticed that they are not joined one with the other. This is no accident, for nature has nowhere provided a convenient channel. This separateness of the two regions has been reflected by the course of Polish expansion, whose natural limit was along the Dnieper-Don watershed.

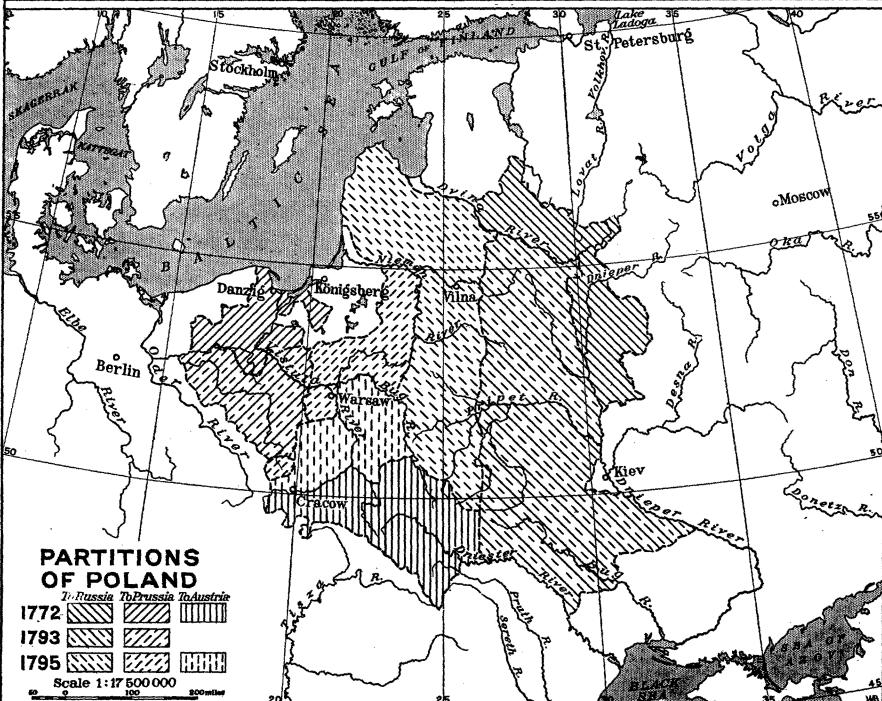
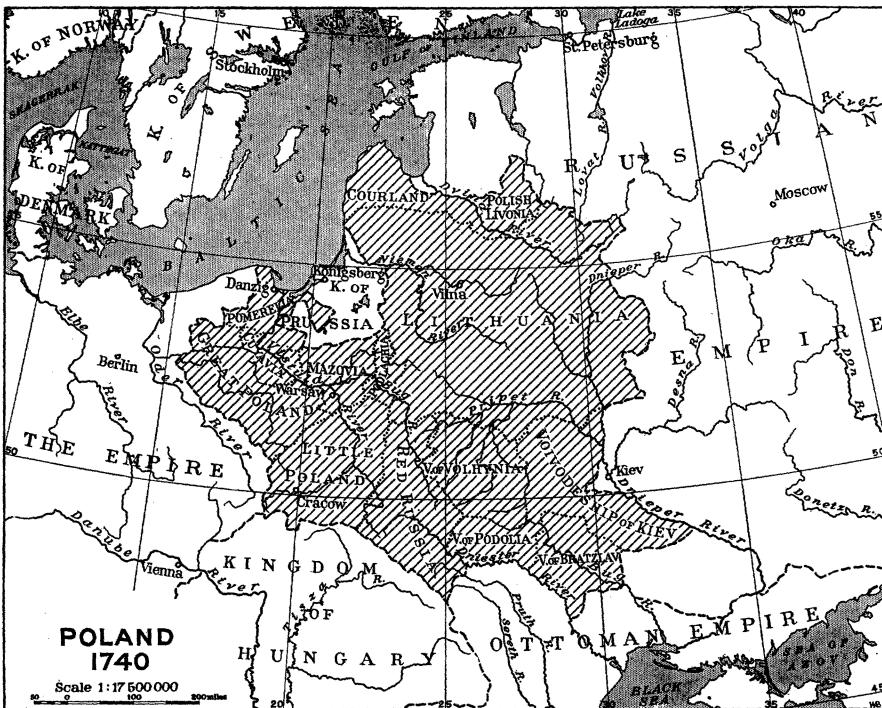


FIG. 11 (upper). Based on Shepherd, Pl. 130-131, and Droysen, Pl. 44.
 FIG. 12 (lower). Based on Putzger, Pl. 25.

THE POSITION OF POLAND IN THE EUROPEAN ORGANISM

It seems all the more necessary to dwell upon the distinct physical difference between Poland and Russia, inasmuch as the conception of "Central Europe" has gained ground, especially in Germany. From such a conception it might follow that whatever is not situated in Central Europe belongs, physically, to the great uniform area of Eastern Europe. To show the discrepancy between that idea and the facts is important.

THE CONCEPTION OF CENTRAL EUROPE A POLITICAL DOCTRINE

The conception of Central Europe originated in Germany, where it became a favorite theme in German political programs. At first, Central Europe was supposed to comprise only Germany, Switzerland, and the original Austrian lands, Galicia excepted (Kirchhoff).¹⁷ Later Belgium and Holland were added, while the eastern boundary was placed at the watershed between the Oder and the Vistula (Penck).¹⁸ To this scheme of Penck, Kretschmer added Denmark.¹⁹ As the bonds of alliance between Germany and the Hapsburg monarchy grew tighter, and because of the renewed compact between the two partners constituting Austria-Hungary, the interest in southeastern Europe of the two Teutonic states was bound to increase. Central Europe, as understood by Partsch,²⁰ is a thoroughgoing expression of this interest. Partsch regards as belonging to Central Europe, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, all of Austria-Hungary, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Rumania, and Bulgaria. The extension of this term to cover the territory from the Atlantic to the Black Sea, the exclusion of Denmark and Poland, indicates the political bias of this otherwise thoroughly scientific book. German science also felt this, but could relinquish neither the idea nor its interpretation. In the meantime the danger of a conflict between Russia and Germany kept growing, and the *noli me tangere* which had been so strikingly applied heretofore to Russia's boundaries in all geographical classifications was swept aside by the course of events. Hettner²¹ added Poland to Central Europe and, in keeping with Hanslik,²² tried to fortify this by a new conception, that of "transitional Europe," which considers Poland as belonging to both Eastern and Central Europe. Finally, Banse²³ worked out an extreme definition. He simply discarded the work of the greatest German minds of the early nineteenth

¹⁷ A. Kirchhoff: *Schulgeographie und Erdkunde*, various editions.

¹⁸ A. Penck: *Physikalische Skizze von Mitteleuropa*, in "Länderkunde des Erdteils Europa," edited by A. Kirchhoff, Part I, first half, Vienna, 1887, pp. 90-113; reference on p. 94.

¹⁹ K. Kretschmer, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²⁰ J. Partsch: *Mitteleuropa*, Gotha, 1901; also in English: Central Europe, in series "The Regions of the World," edited by H. J. Mackinder, Appleton, New York, 1908.

²¹ A. Hettner: *Grundzüge der Länderkunde*, 1. Band: *Europa*, Leipzig, 1907, p. 232.

²² E. Hanslik: *Biala, eine deutsche Stadt in Galizien*, Vienna, 1909, pp. 1-8.

²³ E. Banse: *Geographie*, with map, *Petermanns Mitt.*, Vol. 58, I, 1912, pp. 1-4, 69-74, 120-131, ref. on p. 3. See also "Illustrierte Länderkunde," edited by E. Banse, with map, Brunswick, 1914, pp. 67 and 86-87, reviewed in the Jan., 1917, *Geogr. Rev.* (Vol. 3, pp. 84-85).

century—Pallas, Büsching, Gaspari, Kant, Ritter, Berghaus, Humboldt—who had drawn the eastern frontier of Europe along the Ural,²⁴ and excluded Russia entirely from Europe, creating the conception of “Greater Siberia.” Greater Siberia is adjoined to the west by “Central Europe,” which, in the east, includes Poland and the Russian Baltic provinces, this “being proven,” as Banse puts it, “by their belonging to the sphere of German culture.”

Poland, seen in the light of such concepts, figures as the transitional ground between the two great divisions of the Old World, the West and the East. A mass of literature which was to exploit and spread this view sprang up. Even a serious geologist²⁵ was found who discovered proofs of the “dualism” of Poland, one part of which belongs, like Germany, to Central Europe, and the other to—Greater Siberia!

A historian²⁶ also appeared who demonstrated that the country between the Elbe and the Vistula, and farther east, which had been the cradle of the Germans, lies in the center of Europe and is therefore good ground for German expansion. It is characteristic that, at the same time, a German linguist²⁷ set himself to the task of reviving the theory that “what we nowadays call Belgium and Northern France is old German territory” (*Ein alter deutscher Volksboden*).

But the great world war disrupted the conception of Central Europe as well as the more recent one of “transitional” Europe and “dual” Poland. *Inter arma silent musae*. Science, too, is silenced. For the most dignified voices of Germany’s scientific world²⁸ leave no doubt as to the future trend of the conception of Central Europe, for the names of the Dnieper and the Dvina have actually been mentioned as its eastern limits.

The territorial conception of Poland has been revived by the bloody struggles upon her soil. The concepts of Central Europe, of transitional Europe, and of dual Poland belong to the past: to combat them now would seem futile. This, however, does not prevent us from defining briefly Poland’s position in the physical structure of Europe.

EUROPE’S GEOLOGICAL DIVISIONS

The two most famous geologists of Europe, Suess²⁹ and De Lapparent,³⁰ have seen in Europe the features of two intrinsically different worlds: an eastern one, consisting of the Russian tableland, which, through a long course of the earth’s history, has remained unchanged; and a western one,

²⁴ E. Wisotzki: *Zeitströmungen in der Geographie*, Leipzig, 1897, Chapter VIII: Die Ostgrenze Europas.

²⁵ A. Tornquist: *Feststellung des Südwestrandes des baltisch-russischen Schildes*, *Schriften der phys.-ök. Gesell. Königsberg*, Vol. 49, 1909, pp. 1-12.

²⁶ Merbach: *Slavenkriege des deutschen Volkes*, 1904.

²⁷ ———: *Deutsche Orts- und Flussnamen in Belgien und Nordfrankreich*, *Zeitschr. des Allgemeinen Deutschen Sprachvereins*, Dec., 1914.

²⁸ Hofmüller: *Russlands Westgrenze*, *Süddeutsche Monatsschrift*, Feb., 1915.

²⁹ E. Suess: *Das Antlitz der Erde*, 4 vols., Vienna, 1883-1909.

³⁰ A. de Lapparent: *Leçons de géographie physique*, Paris, 3rd edition, 1907.

i.e., Western Europe, which was subjected to continual deformations. Taking into consideration the diversity of the latter, Europe may be divided structurally into the following five divisions: uniform Eastern Europe, and four practically parallel zones, the northern, or British-Scandinavian zone, that of the lowlands, that of the central mountains, and the Mediterranean zone. In the geological structure of Europe there is no room for Central Europe.

THE NATURAL FOUNDATIONS OF EUROPE'S POLITICAL DIVISIONS

In what way did this framework affect the development of nations and the formation of political divisions in the lowland and central mountain areas?

The development of great states in this region and their growth through the absorption or the consolidation of small political communities were mainly conditioned by a characteristic feature of European geography, namely, the existence of two intercontinental seas, a southern, or Roman, and a northern, or Baltic. Between the two worlds which centered about these seas lay an alpine mountain wall. The organization which controlled the breaches in this wall was in a highly favorable position. Two such gaps existed, the Gate of Toulouse, between the Pyrenees and the Alps (broadly speaking), and the Moravian Gate, between the Alps and the Carpathians. A considerable restriction of the continental mass corresponds to these gates; the Bay of Biscay comes near to the Gulf of the Lion, while the North Sea approaches the Adriatic. This increased the importance of these gateways. Still another feature enhanced these conditions: the Baltic turns north near the mouths of the Vistula and the Niemen, opposite the very region where the Black Sea, the innermost inlet of the Mediterranean, penetrates into the continental mass. Thus three isthmuses have developed in Europe: the French, the German, and the Polish.

POLAND'S ESSENTIAL PHYSICAL ELEMENTS

Poland from the first extended to the Moravian Gate. As early as the seventh century the region was politically organized. The first rays of Christianity penetrated through that gate along with Byzantine civilization. But though the Moravian Gate afforded an easy path across the Carpathians, it led up to an almost inaccessible way to the Adriatic, the passage through the rocky wilderness of the Karst. As a gateway between the northern and southern seas, the Moravian Gate could never compare, even in Roman times, with the convenient passes leading across the Alps. The Brenner Pass, especially, was superior and caused the Adriatic lands to become a region of German political expansion under the Hohenstaufen.

This insufficiency of the Moravian Gate as a southern outlet and the eastward trend of the main affluents of the Vistula undoubtedly account

for the impetus given to Poland's political expansion in the direction of the Baltic-Pontic isthmus. The position of Poland in an area unobstructed by mountains and her equipment with a system of natural valley highways are the basic physical facts which have affected Poland's political existence and development.

THE PHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF POLAND'S UNION WITH LITHUANIA AND RUTHENIA

It seems pertinent to close this discussion with an explanation of the causes by which Poland, rather than Lithuania or Ruthenia, became the bridge between the two seas. The ice of the glacial period never held Ruthenia in its grip, and consequently this province remained a shelter for all life, including man. Nowhere in Poland are there any remains of paleolithic culture such as are found in Ruthenia. The dawn of history greeted Ruthenian lands, and perhaps the people, earlier than it did Poland. Moreover, it was easy for Byzantine influences to stream into Ruthenia, as the channel was broad and free. Many obstacles, however, had to be overcome by the Romans before they could reach the Poland of the Piasts. Thus for centuries Ruthenia towered culturally above its neighbors, Poland and Lithuania. But in Ruthenia power to organize did not go hand in hand with culture. The reasons were many. The greater part of Ruthenia consisted of steppes. Material life therefore absorbed most of the energy of its inhabitants. Meanwhile the steppe remained open to the incursion of organized hordes. But the steppe culture of Ruthenia lacked strength for a defensive organization. Wooded Poland and Lithuania, however, were able to take the initiative in freeing and defending their countries from invasion—a normal occurrence in the steppe. Although Ruthenia brought culture to Lithuania, especially along the valley of the Dnieper, and although Lithuania remained receptive of Ruthenian culture for centuries, still it was Lithuania that furnished the impulse and took the lead in Ruthenia's political organization.

In addition internal weakness was not wanting in Ruthenia. This country, a level land of steppes, was characterized by a sameness of climate, of natural productions, and of material culture that is uncommon over so large an area. This general uniformity was one of the causes of economic dependence, a feature which was strengthened by the lack of communications. For Ruthenia lies mostly in the region known as the Pontic or Ukrainskian plateau, a strongly dissected oldland from which waters flow in all directions. At the time when Poland and Lithuania, as well as the larger part of Europe, were buried under ice, the Ukrainskian crest of land was gradually rising. Under this slow but steady process, the Ukraine reached an elevation of 300 to 600 feet, while its rivers cut their channels to a corresponding depth. Cut by wild and deep ravines the land became a roadless labyrinth. It is not strange that Ruthenia, though from time

to time consolidated by the will of some strong ruler into a single state, should always have relapsed, because of its lack of communications, into many independent principalities.

Totally different were the conditions determining the fusion and physiognomy of the lands belonging to Poland even as early as the time of the Piasts. During the glacial period, the ice-cap, as it receded northward across Poland, would halt from time to time; then a deluge of waters would spring forth from its margin and stream down to the North Sea and the Black Sea. This process created not only the east-and-west valleys in Poland's central zone, but also the peripheral highways of the unglaciated region.

It is not strange then that Ruthenia, linked to Lithuania by the artery of the Dnieper, submitted to her politically, even if, at first, she dominated her culturally. Nor is it strange that later cultural centers of Ruthenia, located upon the Ukrainian plateau, felt the influence of Poland. A wilderness led to the Dnieper, while the fringing ways of communication, such as the Bug, the Pripet, and the Dniester, were all part of the network of Poland's east-and-west valleys.

It is not strange, therefore, that Poland, physiographically varied, should ultimately have attained the highest degree of culture. In control of all the natural highways of Lithuania and Ruthenia, Poland was pre-destined to become the territorial link of these three parts of a physical unit.